THE CITY SEEMED DOOMED TO FALL

The approach of large Gray armies in September, 1862, created panic among Louisville's inhabitants. This drawing shows civilians on the wharf trying to cross the Ohio River to Indiana. Martial law was imposed as efforts were made to shore up Federal defenses of the city, a major supply depot.

Louisville's Civil War crisis passed late in 1862

ficial stand of strict neutrality, spared itself the agony of choosing sides by continuing to do business with both. This foot in each camp attitude also made Louisville a hotbed of intrigue and a mecca for spies, saboteurs and bushwhackers in the early months of the war.

By mid-summer, however, the guise of neutrality was beginning to wear thin. There still was deep feeling for the South, but there was increasing feeling for the Federal union. Neutrality in Louisville came to an end in July when the Port Director ordered a halt to shipments of goods to the South.

A short time later, Robert Anderson, the hero of Fort Sumter who had been promoted to brigadier-general and put in charge of the Military Department of Kentucky, moved his headquarters to Louisville from Cincinnati, and the city officially became the port of entry and supply depot for all Union armies in the West.

Up to mid-1862, Louisville had profited from the war without experiencing any of its direct horrors; no fighting more serious than hit-and-run cavalry raids 15 miles away had taken place.

Actually the city would continue to escape the destruction of war. But before the year was out Louisville would know something of the nightmares of anxiety and concern only the threat of fighting in its streets can bring a city.

For a new drama, one with terrifying possibilities for the North, was about to be unfolded in Kentucky. A determined Southern bid to push the boundaries of the Confederacy to the Ohio was coming, and it would result in the capture of Lexington and Frankfort, and would create panic in Louisville and Cincinnati.

It all started in July after Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell, then commander of the Department of the Cumberland (formerly Department of Kentucky), had moved most of his forces from the state into Tennessee and Alabama, leaving only a handful of raw recruits and Home Guards to protect Louisville, the great supply center.

That was when the Confederates launched a two-prong invasion. One force, under E. Kirby Smith, moved through Cumberland Gap, took Richmond, Lexington and Frankfort, forcing the Legislature to flee to Louisville. The other force, under Braxton Bragg, started from Northwestern Tennessee and moved slower but by late August still had taken Bowling Green and the Green River forts at Munfordville, the last block in the path to Louisville.

The city was thrown into a panic as capture seemed certain. Frightened civilians poured out of the city in a steady stream, many crossing into Indiana via a pontoon bridge hastily stretched across the river. Martial law was imposed; all males between the ages of 18 and 45 years were compelled to enroll for military drills; persons entering and leaving the city were required to have passes.

Then, with Louisville a ripe plum ready for picking, Bragg did the unexpected. Instead of moving on to take the city, he suddenly wheeled right and took up position in Bardstown to join the Smith forces. This movement allowed Buell, who had reversed his field and was marching as fast as possible toward Louisville, to push back into the city late in September, and soon 100,000 experienced troops were guarding its bulging store houses.

However, one of the scandalous events of the war still was to be played out in Louisville. On September 29, after an exchange of hot words, General Jefferson C. Davis shot and killed fellow Union officer, General William Nelson, in the lobby of the Galt House, bringing to an end a long-standing feud between the two.

By early October, Buell was ready to pull out of Louisville for the showdown with the Bragg-Smith Confederates. Elements of the forces came together near Perryville on October 8 and, while neither side could claim victory, after an afternoon of hard, bloody fighting, the Southern invasion ground to a halt there.

Two days later Gray troops were retreating from Kentucky, never to return again in size.

The Civil War crisis had been passed in Louisville, and 1863 made its entry with the city once more firmly restored to its status as a Union supply depot.